



# Social Exclusion and Capability

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## **Social Exclusion and Capability**

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In his paper on social exclusion for the Asian Development Bank (Sen, 2000), Amartya Sen mentions that the term “social exclusion” is of recent origin. He gives credit to the French policy maker Remy Lenoir of being the author of the expression in the mid seventies. But he also mentions that the term has become an umbrella concept under which a wide range of social and economic problems have been loosely sheltered. Remy Lenoir, for instance, spoke of the following as constituting the “excluded”: “mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, social parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social misfits”. To speak of social exclusion requires clarification. Amartya Sen argues that one can appreciate more fully the new literature on social exclusion by placing it in the broader concept of “the old –very aged- idea of poverty as capability deprivation”. I totally agree with a line of research focussing on people’s capabilities and I would like to suggest you to read this Sen’s paper.

However, in my conference I will follow a slightly (but modestly) different path. I will consider that social exclusion is qualitatively different from what is usually considered as poverty. I will emphasise that, to be politically addressed, social exclusion, and not poverty, has to be understood as *capability deprivation*. There are at least three reasons for such a choice. Firstly, too often poverty is implicitly understood as monetary poverty, which is not simply the case for social exclusion. Secondly, one can no longer think of and act on social issues as if the reality of the problems to deal with had not been constructed by half a century or more of social policies. Historically, it is true that the ‘social question’ in our countries – in other words the threat to the established order created by the fact that underprivileged social classes do not have access to the full range of society’s resources – was first tackled as the ‘fight against poverty’. However, since a long time, social policies have been sophisticated and instituted to deal with several specific social risks like unemployment, old age, illness, family and so on. Poverty has not, of course, disappeared, but has taken new social forms, partly as a by-product of these policies. So I am not sure that we have anything to gain in putting new wine in the old bottle of poverty. Thirdly, the realities that lead to welfare state

intervention cannot be considered independently of the social categorisations used by these policies and their shaping of expectations and behaviours as a consequence. These categorisations are linked to normative models about what is fair to do for the state. Each normative model leads to select what information is relevant on people needing help and this creates social effects.

The section 1 illustrates the “new facts”, labelled as social exclusion, and the need to reinterpret social policies as informational bases on social justice. Section 2 presents the capability approach in the line of Sen’s works. Section 3 develops some methodological issues about collecting relevant information on capabilities.

## **I. Social exclusion and informational basis on social justice. An illustration**

There have always been people in social difficulties. What is new today – and this properly constitutes “social exclusion” - is that existing social policies prove to be irrelevant to deal with such people, at least with a significant part of their problems. In such a perspective, one can say that excluded people are those who slip through the nets of existing social protection systems, whatever complex these systems have become. Either the solutions that they find in those systems or schemes are inadequate to their situation, or they do not fulfil their criteria of selection and of eligibility. Or if by chance they are eligible, they do not claim for their rights and do not use the facilities offered. Being and doing so, such persons hurt the current expectations that we, as citizens, have about the efficiency and completeness of our systems of social protection. Hence the social and political visibility of those persons, who appear at times and in situations where nobody should have been normally expected. Generally speaking, social exclusion is symptomatic of some raising problems and issues to which the social protection systems of our developed countries (especially in Europe) are confronted.

To illustrate the “new facts” not grasped with established social categorisation, let me take an example<sup>1</sup> transposed from a Sen’s short story (Sen, 1999, 54-55) (see Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> The example has been suggested to me by Nicolas Farvaque (2003). I also have gratefully benefited from the survey on Sen’s works that he has undertaken.

**Table 1. Worlds of welfare state as ex ante evaluation of persons**

Person	Social identification	Relevant information	World of welfare state	Problems to solve
A	Poor	Household and individual income	Liberal	Poverty trap
B	Having worked hard all his/her life	Work career	Continental	Lack of work competencies
C	Ill person without any ambition	Qualify of life	Nordic	Social dependency

What about D, no income, a life of bad jobs, severe conditions of life and health and no personal agency?

The owner of a domain would like to recruit somebody to maintain her garden. Three persons (respectively A, B and C) respond to the offer, each of them seeming adequate to do the job. However the owner who makes effort to act with fairness and social justice is preoccupied. She would like to make a good choice, that is a choice that obeys to her sense of justice (in other words, to some normative model, acknowledged to be so in the society in which she lives). The problem is that there are three available models, which focuses on specific information and lets apart other information as irrelevant. Each set of information constitutes a “territory of justice” (Sen, 1990, 111): “The informational basis of a judgement identifies the information on which the judgement is directly dependent and – no less important – asserts that the truth or falsehood of any other type of information cannot *directly* influence the correctness of the judgement. The informational basis of judgement on justice (IBJJ) thus determines the factual territory over which considerations of justice *directly* apply”. This basis delineates what data count to make a fair judgement about the situation of the person at stake. It basis also contributes to define the type of help and the way to provide it. With regard to state action, this basis is both foundational and pragmatic (Sen, 1999a, 86).

The problem again is that there are several possible informational bases and territories of justice. The person A is the poorest. And it will happen that, if not recruited, A and his family have no income. What is more important than to help needy people, asks the owner to herself? However, after scrutiny, B appears the most deserving person. He has worked hard all his life in unskilled jobs and has been, one year ago, fired out in a collective redundancy. Due to old age, his chances to find a job are very thin. What is better than helping people who proved to have actively participated to the life of community and contributed to its wealth? Interviewing C, the owner becomes aware that C is very ill and spends most of his money in drugs, medical exams and treatments. C has lost any ambition and has no expectations and projects for the future. Would not be fairer to give the job to C? This will help him to improve the quality of his life and to find again some meaning to it.

Let us for a while the owner with her embarrassment and come back to our issues. Situations A, B and C are examples of three modes of selecting information in welfare policies. Of course, all the three persons have some income, some past work experience; each has some conditions of life, private (housing, transport, health, family responsibilities, ...) and social (participation to the life of the community). However, the relevant information is selected through the normative model that defines the criteria of what is good and just. If one looks at the corresponding general models or “worlds of welfare state” (as popularised by Esping-Andersen, 1990), it is easy to connect A with the liberal poverty-oriented welfare state, B with the continental work-oriented welfare state and C to the Scandinavian quality-of-life welfare state. Each world founds its mode of evaluation and type of action on a specific IBJJ. Doing so, it constructs the state of the person (A, B or C), both empirically and normatively in a special way.

Furthermore, if the treatment happens to be inefficient and create “perverse effects”, problems to solve are conceived as arising, above all: from poverty trap for the liberal model; from lack of work competencies for the continental model; from social dependency for the nordic model. Policy adjustments are searched for along these lines of reflection. For instance, the French government has very recently decided to complete the RMI (*Revenu Minimum d’Insertion*) with the RMA (*Revenu Minimum d’Activité*). The RMI, created in 1989, is a

major scheme for struggling against social exclusion (more than one million of beneficiaries today). It consists of a monetary allowance, roughly half the minimum wage, provided to people in difficulties with very low income. Its provision is delivered by local committees. These committees are composed by the representatives of the administrations concerned by exclusion, of associations (non-profit and voluntary organisations) and of elected municipalities. In the rebuilt scheme, long term RMI beneficiaries that are recruited by an employer into halftime tasks through a special contract will receive this RMA (approximately of the same amount) in replacement of their previous RMI. Even if monetary incentives are given to beneficiaries and to employers to favour a deal, it is not so much to solve a poverty trap than to create work experiences. People are supposed to have better chances to find a job in the future after this work experience.

I will come back to these valuation aspects in the next sections. Imagine now that a fourth person D knocks at the door of our owner. Investigation reveals that D has presently no income, that her only work experience has always been bad jobs for short and interrupted periods, that she has severe conditions of life and health (no decent housing, living in a stigmatised neighbourhood, several diseases, etc.). And, ultimately, that D has lost any feeling of what could be a personal agency. At first glance, it could seem to the owner that D has priority over A, B and C and that she should be chosen. Because, D formally and simultaneously satisfies the criteria of the three underlining models of social justice and welfare provision. Nevertheless it would be immediately evident for any observer and for the owner that to choose her will not be a solution for her problems. D is not correctly identified, nor fairly evaluated by any of the three worlds of welfare and their general categories. She is not simply poor, or lacking of work competencies or having bad conditions of life. All these deficiencies interact at a personal level in a kind of vicious circle. Using standard information and solution for one issue will not improve any of them. Situation of D with its singularity is precisely the case for which an approach in terms of *capability deprivation* can be both fair and efficient.

## II. Sen and the capability approach

In order to be brief, I make the assumption that you know something about Sen's works. I will first try to focus on what in his works is especially relevant for social exclusion issues. I will then list the facts that plead in favour of apprehending social exclusion as capability deprivation and, finally, suggest that a capability approach is, above all, a practical methodology.

### 2.1. The theoretical framework

The core concepts of the capability approach need to be recalled: functionings, effective (or substantial) freedom to achieve and capabilities. These concepts are interdependent. The best is to quote Amartya Sen himself.

1. "*Functionings* represent parts of the state of a person – in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life" (Sen, 1993: 31). Functionings are not objects detached of the person; they are doings or beings, the achievements of which (or, alternatively, the freedom to achieve) are valued by the person. To evaluate the well-being of a person requires to evaluate to what extent she has achieved (or has the effective freedom to achieve) the functionings she values. If one takes the example of D and considers her concrete situation, the functionings she could be presumed to value are, at least, some basic functionings like good health, good housing, a decent wage. For an external observer, D objectively needs the achievement of such functionings, not to speak of other immaterial and equally important functionings like participating to the life of some community, dignity or self-respect.
2. "The *capability of a person* reflects the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose a collection" (Sen, 1993: 31). For Sen the metrics of capabilities is the right metrics for judging individual advantage and, beyond, to evaluate inequality within a given society. Such an evaluation is intermediary between evaluation in terms of outcomes (such as wealth, income, basket of commodities, utility or preferences) and evaluation in terms of primary goods or means (see scheme 1). There is a huge theoretical debate on these issues in economics. I would



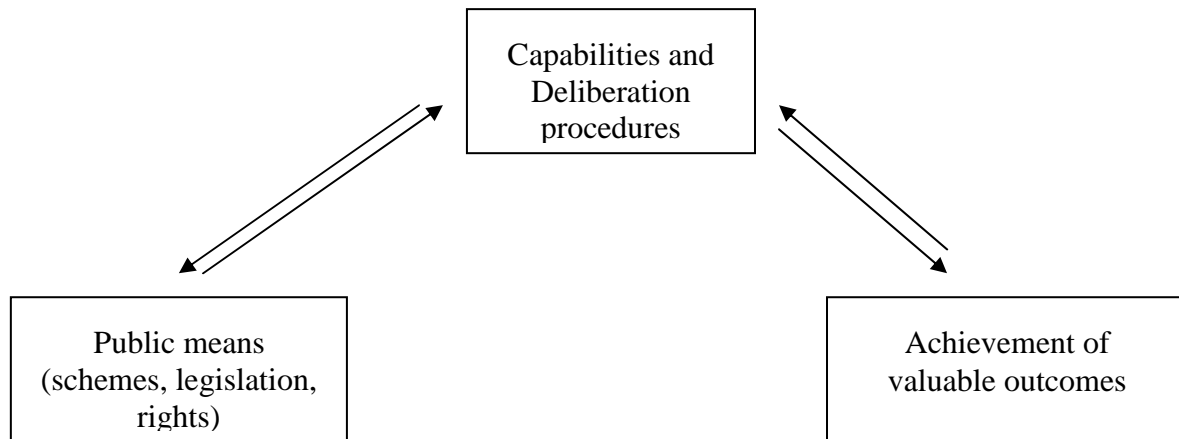
not present this debate except to say that Sen gives priority and antecedence to empirical evidence over normative justification. It could be the case that, globally speaking, the market is the optimal design to build social institutions and that, in a market perspective, what people deserving help only need are means-tested monetary benefits. Nevertheless empirical evidence shows that, when faced by the same hazard, people are unequal in their possibilities to overcome it and in access to effective opportunities. Beyond normative choice, what is crucial is the unequal rate of conversion of given means into desirable outcomes. The evidence is not simply inequality of means (or resources), but inequality of capabilities between people. And this evidence is of prime importance in implementing public policies. For instance, for the disabled to attain equality in access to transportation, it is objectively better to ensure that means of public transport be fitted with especially designed entrance doors. Because the power to convert monetary benefits into the functioning “transport” is lower for the disabled than for the able. It would not be fair, nor efficient to provide the disabled only with cash.

To struggle against inequality of capabilities is the true problem for social policies. It is not to militate in favour of the normative model one believes to be the best.

3. It follows from (1) and (2) that *effective freedom to be and to do* (and the scope of this freedom) is essential for judging the capabilities of a person. A capability approach to welfare takes into account both the achievements and the freedom to achieve. An achieved functioning (for instance to be fed) that has been obtained by obliging a person to take food risks to be of no value, for the person has no freedom to choose between taking or not taking food. What ultimately counts is access to effective freedom and, beyond, to reflexive learning of his or her possibilities to act by himself. A right appreciation on these matters is not of course easy. Many situations are source of dilemmas. Judgement requires prudence and openness to unpredictable circumstances. By obliging the person to take food in urgency, it is likely that she has been saved from death. However, to develop her capabilities, it would have been preferable in addition to create around her a material and immaterial environment that provides (non monetary) incentives to be able to choose, an environment that generates a virtuous dynamics over time.

**Scheme 1. Capabilities as operational mediation  
between means and valuable outcomes**

Evaluating the state of the person



Social exclusion as capability deprivation is thus, for one part, the lack of basic functionings, material such as being correctly fed, housed, educated, having a decent job, or immaterial such as having social relations, voting, etc. It is, for the other part, the lack of effective freedom to choose and to act in the circumstances where the person is staying. These two parts are really *non separable*. If one of them is absent, the person continues to suffer from capability deprivation. For, in Sen's views, the ultimate target is to provide the person with autonomy of development and possibility to reflexivity and self-responsibility.

With regards to the lack of any personal agency for most of excluded people, access to effective freedom is key in social exclusion issues. If our previous owner offers to D a free housing simply by charity, there is danger that D develops a greater social dependency. Saving D from house need is obviously good. But in itself it would not necessarily save her durably, except if this first action is followed by a process providing D with capabilities. Studies on the homeless (Labbens and Oberti in Paugam, 1996) highlight the value of dignity, or in a negative form, the shame that is attached to the nature of housing. Shelter in emergency housing (Raveaud, 2000) affords inhabitants a level of comfort which often they had not known before, and they are well aware of this. But it does not necessarily provide

self-respect, one of the fundamental aspects of inclusion. Sometimes the residents of emergency houses are reluctant to give out their address, which is too easily recognised, in particular by the potential employers.

I have recalled, above, the current debate in France on prolonging RMI by RMA. Voluntary organisations in charge of RMI beneficiaries underline the distance from work for many of these beneficiaries in terms of inability to develop effective freedom, even to satisfy basic needs like health. A witness among others: “He was out of reality when we recuperated him. He had even forgotten that he was receiving the RMI; the money was sleeping in a bank count, probably opened by a social worker for him. Four years were necessary to convince him to go to take tooth caring”<sup>2</sup>. Voluntary organisations insist on the need to calibrate and to combine cash and services in kind very carefully both individually and in-process (that is along the process of inclusion). If it is not the case, people will be obliged to take responsibilities they cannot assume and to be unfairly penalised. “It is good to put the accent on professional inclusion, but people far from the world of work risk to be unable to satisfy the obligations generated by the RMA inclusion contract and to lose their allowance”<sup>3</sup>. If so, the RMA scheme in France would lead to the opposite of the outcome searched for. The a priori less capable persons will be excluded, even from the provision of minimum income, instead of entering a process of acquiring capabilities. Such adverse selection is unfortunately at work in a number of the schemes supposed to help people to be included. Only the best capable are selected at the entrance of schemes, which reproduces exclusion.

## 2.2. Empirical observation and capability deprivation

Empirical observation pleads in favour of apprehending social exclusion as capability deprivation. Four points are worth to be quoted<sup>4</sup>.

- a. Even if social exclusion can be said as *relative* when looking at the availability on goods or services or income people have, it has an *absolute* dimension in terms of capabilities. This is its major and qualitative difference from poverty as classically

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<sup>2</sup> Association Solidarité-Accueil, Châteauroux, in *Le Monde*, 7 May 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Bruno Grouès, Uniopss, in *Le Monde*, 7 May 2003.

<sup>4</sup> For some developments, Raveaud and Salais, 2002 .

understood (see the debate between Townsend and Sen in the 1980s<sup>5</sup>). Many studies<sup>6</sup> reveal that the number and quality of available commodities or services are very low for people and households at the bottom of income distributions. However, the true question is to have or to have not the capability to achieve the corresponding functionings. For instance, a RMI beneficiary (or a long-term unemployed or a disabled person or a young under 25 in social difficulties) could be accepted in a job, in particular when local employers have a sense of ethics; however, very often he or she will not have the capability to stay in it; more than some days or hours. Knowing these facts, local agencies or voluntary organisations are reluctant to provide employers with people whose they have some doubts on such a capability. Even if they are pressed by their hierarchy to improve the figures and their quantitative performance, the staffs responsible at local levels, if they value their missions, cannot work (and have a good self-evaluation) without having intuition of this absoluteness (Farvaque, 2000 ; Martinon, 2002).

b. Very often lacks of achieved functionings are correlated and *interact* in a negative way. Access to one of them conditions access to others. For instance, as underlined above, housing conditions can vary in quality, but living in some housing or neighbourhood or address can lead to an absolute deprivation in terms of labour market access. Reciprocally the inability to find and keep a decent job can prevent to find good housing conditions. Thus there is a great need to solve the problems progressively and in a coherent way, in particular in beginning by the most important one that crucially determines future possibilities. Even when the ultimate goal is return to job, the primary condition can be health improvement or the recovering of regular habits. This has to be dealt with, first.

c. Social exclusion is marked with *unpredictability*. Something happens in the life of the person or her family that was impossible to predict: a private accident; a professional injury; a job loss due to economic conditions; a health disease. Individual biographies and life stories of excluded people are full of these unpredictable incidents. Often judged as minor at their beginning, these incidents prove to have major consequences that are quickly out of individual control. This constitutes one of the reasons for which persons slip through the standard welfare systems or programs.

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<sup>5</sup> Sen, 1983 and Townsend, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, by using ECHP data.

d. Absoluteness, interaction and unpredictability, all converge toward the requirement that the relevant features of social exclusion (relevant in that only they can help to define an efficient and fair solution) have to be grasped *at the level of the person in cause*. This could be viewed as a rather demanding requirement. The combination of detailed investigation and respect of the person may be hard to manage. However, objective evaluation of the state of the person corresponds to the priority of inquiry over normative justification upon which Sen insists. Evaluation has to be *situated*, what means to focus on the relevant features of the personal situation to deal with. This is not to say that such evaluation is difficult per se or unpractical. Each situation under review requires a careful judgement, in which all relevant facts are produced, confronted and weighted. One can say that such evaluation tries to select the information susceptible of delineating around each person this “territory of justice” or IBJJ that we spoke above. Information can use general categories or, most often, idiosyncratic knowledge of the person, its past, character, problems and projects and so on. As Sen (1996) recalls, collective deliberation can be necessary as well as participation of potential recipients in order to produce a fair balanced judgement.

To conclude this section, I would like to emphasise that these requirements to implement a capability approach are in no way utopian. The practical operation of French schemes, like the RMI (Astier, 1997) or inclusion policies for young people in difficulties (Farvaque and Salais, 2002), both implemented at a local level, share some features close to a capability approach. Their origin, philosophy and context have no inspiration in Sen’s works; they belong to the French tradition of social rights. However one can say that they share the same “capability intuition”. For instance, at least for those (one third) who benefit from an “insertion contract”, the RMI is more than a means-tested allowance. In fact it is qualitatively different from such allowances. Local committees that deliver the RMI work through collective deliberation, using in general a lot of information, general, local and personal, recipients’ interviews included. Though a zone of uncertainty always remains, the quest seems less to detect the potential cheaters than to appreciate to what extent the state of the person in cause responds to the practical philosophy of the scheme. As to be provided is a right guaranteed by law, the deliberation is, in general, seriously lead, arguments weighted one against the other, and the ex ante presumption not unfavourable. People (or organisations that help them) can contest negative decisions in courts of justice. This possibility, of course, does not impede negative

decisions, but requires tight argumentation. As Astier, 1997, shows, meetings of local committees also serve to provide recipients with advice and recommendation to do this or that (for instance, to go to the local agency for employment, to take care of his health, ...). In its next meetings, the committee can verify whether its recommendation has been executed.

### 2.3. The capability approach as a practical methodology<sup>7</sup>

The preceding remarks suggest that a capability approach does not directly lead to optimal design of schemes, programs or policies. It does not belong to a constructivist approach to institutions. It has to do with such objectives, of course. A capability approach would recommend some types of rules or procedures more than others, such as implementation at local levels, deliberating committees for providing help; participation of the potential recipients; not to focus exclusively on means, but also on the apprenticeship by recipients of effective freedom, of reflexivity and progressive responsibility; in-process calibration of help. The foundation of schemes on enforceable individual rights seems also guarantee some minimum democratisation. This is far from being negligible.

However, a capability approach is, above all, *a practical methodology* that should be in use in every social scheme, program or policy. It draws attention to the fact that people threatened by social exclusion can exist apart from the schemes and policies officially designed to deal with this issue. Maybe more potentially excluded persons are out there than in specialised schemes, for instance people registered into employment agencies, or into various social and medical schemes. In other words, in my view a capability approach cannot be used to justify and create, through institutionalisation, a general and substantial category of “exclusion” (as it has historically been done for unemployment or old age retirement). Exclusion has become a social question, but it concerns periods of life of persons whose destiny is, by no means, to stay into exclusion and to be socially labelled as such. Policies must avoid routine, vertical hierarchy and standardisation as far as possible. These are key conditions for maintaining autonomy, innovation and democracy.

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<sup>7</sup> More is said in Salais and Villeneuve (2004).

A capability approach will plead for using existing schemes and systems *in an innovative way*; for instance by overcoming institutional barriers between specialised agencies; by creating horizontal links at local level between administrations, social workers, associations and other organisations, municipalities; by leaving room to local adaptations of general schemes; by authorising “flexibility” (i.e. the possibility to indifferently use at a local level several types of measures within a global funding, in order to better cope with local peculiarities); by making social practitioners aware of what they are truly doing. If politically engaged, a capability approach will help to break the barriers between normatively-based systems of social protection, like the three well-known worlds of welfare state I used in my beginning story. More than a planned political strategy coming up from the top, it should constitute a collective movement and commitment that should involve all actors concerned at all levels. By such a way, a process of learning and acquiring experience could possibly develop and result in reforms of existing schemes.

The last issue I will develop, but not the least, is about the status of information to collect on the capabilities of the persons. While specific, this issue has nevertheless close links with policy and implementation. Objectivity and justice are common requirements to all these issues.

### **III. Collecting information on capabilities**

Collecting information on the persons to be helped and on their situation is crucial in a capability approach. As I recalled, priority should be given on objectivity over normative justification. This requirement applies to the provision of help, to its combination between material and immaterial types of help as well as to its duration and in-process calibration. What are the functionings that the person at stake, given her situation, can achieve or have achieved, and to what degree with regards to some individual or general reference? Looking at this set of achieved or attainable functionings allows to appreciate the capability of the person. The ultimate criterion of evaluation is the scope of effective freedom he or she can develop “to lead the life he or she has reason to value”.

Empirical and methodologically-funded facts are all the more important as public policies and collective investments are expected to develop capabilities and effective freedom. Sen (1985b: 208) underlines that two conceptions of freedom exist: individual control on choice; effective power to do and to be. Political philosophy has been mainly concerned with the latter (which focuses on how individual choices are made). Sen is more in favour of the former (effective power). No matter how the choice is made, the important thing is that the person has the power to do and to be. This second conception of freedom opens the route for substantial public policies. Public policies are then conceived as creating a material and immaterial social environment that provides people with effective power (in other terms capabilities). “A person’s ability to achieve various valuable functionings may be greatly enhanced by public action and policy, and these expansions of capability are not unimportant for freedom for that reason” (Sen, 1993: 44). For instance, there are two ways to live in a disease-free environment<sup>8</sup>. One way is to give to individuals the possibility to choose to stay or to start away from the disease environment, with regards to their preferences or utilities; the other one is to lead public policies eradicating the disease. People have then the power to live in a disease-free environment, though they have not explicitly choose it. This can be said a counterfactual conception of freedom.

However, *observation cannot be separated from evaluation*. Observation requires selection of what is relevant to observe and of what is not. Functionings to observe are those that can be considered as *valuable*. It would be, for instance, irrelevant and even ridiculous to ask to households what kind of wash powder they use when the issue is to improve public policies with regards to health and live conditions. In a society where wash powder is of general use, capabilities and effective freedom have no link with brands of powder<sup>9</sup>. Things can be different in a society and at a time when wash powder is just appearing. Households (in particular women and, perhaps, men) who have access to it (in correlation with the use of wash machines) can be presumed having more capabilities than the others. When they focus on the person’s capabilities, both policy makers and researchers are confronted to the selection of the valuable functionings, largely in the same way.

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<sup>8</sup> Sen’s example is malaria.

<sup>9</sup> An example taken from Sen, 1992 : 71.



This selection problem has two faces, a collective one and an individual one.

For a society as a whole, establishing the list of valuable functionings (or at least having such a perspective debated) is essential. It is important to determine the domains where the state (or some collective agency) acknowledges its collective responsibility to substantially act in direction of the corresponding issues. Policies struggling against social exclusion need this kind of list, which serves as a benchmark for implementing inquiries, measures, decisions for help. More than a list per se, the ultimate objective seems to install and to legitimate some IBJJ on social exclusion that meets consensus and helps mutual expectations about what has to be done.

But selecting relevant information has also an individual face. Capabilities evaluation at an individual level must bring (in Sen's words) on "the life he or she has reason to live". From the point of view of a public evaluator (call him E), it is not sure that all the facets of the life chosen by the person (call her P) deserve help. This evaluator is, by definition, an external evaluator; it has to value functionings with objectivity (what capabilities do they *effectively* afford to P?). Hence the question is how to weigh the different functionings to which P gives value for himself. Even after selection of the functionings publicly relevant, weightings can be made along two metrics: that of P himself; that of the public external evaluator E. There are many reasons for divergence between P and E evaluations on the same situation. Some may be worthy, others not. A good reason is the inter-individual variability on the weights attributed to the same functionings. P values more reading at home than Q who is most motivated by working hard in his garden, for instance. If one takes for granted that these are two valuable functionings, such a subjective differentiation may be kept by the public evaluator in his evaluation. However, variability can be due to bad reasons. For instance, it is well-known that people in great difficulties or disarray under-estimates their poor conditions of life. Poor people have been accustomed to have less ambition than richer people, to work in tougher conditions, to be satisfied with less, etc. Social justice requires to correct this individual bias or neglect. In that case, it can be justified to give priority to objective external evaluation to the subjective one.

I have tried to sum up these rather hard points in Table 2. Table 2 differentiates the points of view of P, the person whose situation is evaluated and E the external investigator (the state or the researcher). It leads to four conceptions of social inquiry on capabilities. What is striking is that, in every social inquiry, both P and E have to occupy two different positions: that of an observer who empirically makes effort to produce objective information; that of an evaluator who, provided with a metrics of capabilities, tries to value the life led by P. Both P and E are facing difficult tasks: for P to be reflexive in observing his or her situation and in valuing it (a priori two different exercises); for E to be objective in externally observing the situation of P and in valuing it (also different exercises). Very often, this plurality of postures and their impact of the subsequent information produced in each case are neglected, which leads to methodological and political problems.

**Table 2. Four conceptions of social inquiry on people's capabilities**



Observer	Evaluator	
	Individual P	External Investigator E
 Individual P	1  Opinion poll on satisfaction (Eurobarometer)	3  External evaluation based on individual reports of personal experience (ECHP)
 External investigator E	2  External report based on individual evaluations (Schokkaert and Von Oostegem, 1990 ; Le Clainche, 1994)	4  Objective evaluation based on external general standards (HDI at its beginning)

Table 2 tells us first that *social facts are both descriptive and evaluative*. One cannot hope to escape this fatality; better is to assume it. Though, at least at my knowledge, Sen has never been far away in inquiry issues, he seems to be aware of them (Sen, 1980, 1985a). For these reasons Sen let open the question of the right list of socially valuable functionings. Selecting the right list, if such a list exists, cannot belong to the researcher or the theorist. Ex ante scientific demonstration of its optimality is not a sufficient reason to a priori validate a normative model. The list is socially determined by the society and the historical period at stake. It depends of the conventions shared by the population under review. It needs to be collectively constructed. In other words, choice of a list is a “social choice” exercise; it has to be let to public deliberation. As Sen (1996: 117) underlines in relation to trade-offs between efficiency and equity: “These trade-offs are also part of public judgement, and what this exercise requires is not so much a cunning solution to reduce them into one dimension, but the identification of relevant considerations, suggesting particular proposals and encouraging public discussion on those considerations and proposals.”

Scientists have to participate in this social choice exercise by bringing their own resources and arguments in equality with other actors, not by determining its outcome. This is debatable of course (see, for instance, the position of Martha Nussbaum, 2000). Table 2 suggests that there are four possibilities to build up information, from which existing efforts to make a capability approach operational can borrow. Table 2 is restricted to inquiries administered at distance. As they are lead in local agencies that receive potential recipients, face-to-face interviews pose additional issues: for instance the power unbalance between the officer and the interviewed person, the pressure exercised on answers by the fact the interviewed people needs help, and so on.

In Method 1 (top left), the individual P is both her own observer and evaluator. Method 1 leads to something like a poll survey which asks to individuals what opinions they have about their diverse conditions of life and work (are they excellent, good, passable, etc.). Such inquiry into satisfaction (think of Eurobarometer) will suffer from all the well-known problems of bias and entrenchment. In Method 4 (down right), the external investigator (the state or the theorist) is both the observer and the evaluator of the individual P. P is never given the floor. E has already elaborated a list of what he considers socially valuable functionings with scales of evaluation. He observes and measures the capabilities of P with the help of

these list and scales. Inter-individual variability of personal ends and weights attributed to functionings has disappeared. Externally, one decides what is good or bad for everybody. Whatever the theoretical foundations (philosophical, economical or political, ...) of the chosen list and their disputability, Method 4 is exposed to the critics already made on ex ante determination. The poverty line approach (where inequality of capabilities is reduced to income inequality) is a very crude illustration of Method 4. One may wonder to what extent the fixation by the researcher before investigation, of a general and unique list of basic functionings (as used, for instance, in Robbeyns, 2003) escapes from such simplifications. The first and most simplistic versions of the HDI (Human Development Index) presumably suffered from the same problems.

Methods 2 (down left) and 3 (top right) seem the most promising to capture capabilities. Both let room to externally controlled subjectivity (P is her own evaluator in 2, her own observer in 3). In my view, illustrations of Method 2 are the works on unemployed people by Schokkaert and Van Ootegem (1990) and on excluded people by Le Clainche (1994). In each case, questionnaires are administered to individuals and answers capture personal evaluations of the life led. Factorial analysis (multiple correspondences) is used to aggregate inter-individual variability into a number of functionings, those which capture the maximum of variance. Functionings are not pre-fixed; they are generated through individual inquiry and analysis. Value is given to them by individual answers. For instance, Schokkaert and Van Ootegem (1990) found six factors, like social isolation, feeling happy, physical injury, to be able to plan his future. Method 3, by contrast, is using external valuation of functionings. This still requires a questionnaire administered to individuals, but with questions about facts inspiring objective answers. An illustration is the questionnaire of the ECHP (European Community Household Panel) which was using questions like this: "Does your employer provides free or subsidised services or benefits to employees in any of the following areas?: child-minding or crèche, health care or medical insurance, education and training, sports and leisure, holiday centre; free or subsidised housing". As individual evaluation is also collected on the same items, ECHP was a very promising tool not only for objectively evaluating achieved functionings, but also for controlling the quality of subjective evaluations (Labbouz and Salais, 2003).

By necessity, my discussion has let aside many open methodological questions, not the least being the passage from evaluation of achieved functionings to effective freedom to achieve (hence a dynamic conception of capabilities). However this quick review of empirical works, trying to make a capability approach operational, helps to conclude to some optimism for future research, in particular on social exclusion issues.

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